UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/280
14 August 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-second session
Item 100 (g) of the provisional agenda*

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Background

1. By its resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989, the General Assembly decided to convene a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. The Conference resulted in the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,[1] Agenda 21[2] and the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests.[3] These documents were subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/190 of 22 December 1992. By the same resolution, the Assembly decided to convene, not later than 1997, a special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. In its resolutions 50/113 of 20 December 1995 and 51/181 of 16 December 1996, the General Assembly decided that the special session should be at the highest possible level of participation and the determined organizational modalities for the preparations for the special session, including the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as of other relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system. The Assembly recognized the important role played by major groups, including non-governmental organizations, in the implementation of the recommendations of

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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the Conference, and highlighted the need for their active involvement in the preparations for the special session, as well as the need to ensure appropriate arrangements for their contribution during the special session.

4. In its resolution 51/181, the General Assembly also decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21", and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at that session a report on the special session.

Work of the special session

5. The nineteenth special session of the General Assembly was held at United Nations Headquarters from 23 to 28 June 1997. The session was attended by 55 heads of State or Government or similar level officials, 178 ministers of various rank, and executive heads and high-level officials of a large number of the international organizations and institutions, both from within and outside the United Nations system, as well as representatives of numerous non-governmental organizations accredited to the United Nations.

6. At the nineteenth special session, a number of new features were introduced in the work of the United Nations. These include:

(a) It was the first session of the General Assembly that was organized for the purpose of a five-year review of progress achieved since a major global conference was held under the auspices of the United Nations. Experience gained during the preparations for and the proceeding of the special session would need to be carefully examined and taken into account in the preparations for other forthcoming special sessions of the Assembly that will carry out reviews of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcomes of other recent global conferences;

(b) The nineteenth special session was the first "summit"-level global meeting held on United Nations premises when a high-level debate in plenary meetings was held in parallel with negotiations on the text of the draft final document that were taking place in the Ad hoc Committee of the Whole of the Nineteenth Special Session established for that purpose;

(c) Furthermore, it was the first session of the General Assembly that provided an opportunity for the active involvement of non-governmental organizations, which were invited to address the Assembly and to make an important contribution both during the preparatory work carried out by the Commission on Sustainable Development and during the deliberations in the special session itself;

(d) The session involved a large number of participants from Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the media. It also included a large number of side-events, presentations and exhibitions. In a way, the scope of the meeting was more of a major global conference than a session of the Assembly. It showed a number of logistical limitations related

to holding such events on United Nations premises, whose physical capacities were almost exceeded during the work of the special session.

Outcome of the special session

7. The special session resulted in the adoption of General Assembly resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, the annex to which contains the programme for further implementation of Agenda 21. The programme includes:

(a) A statement of commitment to Agenda 21 and to the goals of sustainable development, which call for integration of economic, social and environmental policies and actions at all levels, and to global partnership aimed at achieving sustainable development worldwide and meeting equitably the needs of present and future generations;

(b) Assessment of progress made since the Conference in all main areas of Agenda 21 and other outcomes and commitments made at the Conference;

(c) A broad range of decisions and recommendations aimed at fostering progress in various sectoral and cross-sectoral areas of Agenda 21 and, in particular, in its means of implementation. The Assembly also identified actions needed in a number of relatively new areas for international cooperation, such as sustainable transportation and sustainable tourism;

(d) Decisions aimed at strengthening global and regional institutional arrangements for achieving sustainable development;

(e) Recommendations on the future methods of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the programme of work for the Commission for the period 1998-2002.

Follow-up work at the substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council

8. Acting on the decisions and the recommendations of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, as contained in the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997 (Geneva, 30 June-26 July 1997) adopted two relevant resolutions.

9. In its resolution 1997/63 of 25 July 1997, entitled "Programme of Work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002 and future methods of work of the Commission", the Council, inter alia:

(a) Approved the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002, and the provisional agenda for the sixth session of the Commission;

(b) Invited the Commission to adjust its future methods in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 132 and 133 of the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21;

(c) Changed the pattern of elections of the Commission's bureau (specific modalities for the transitional period from the current arrangements to the new ones are expected to be decided by the Council at its resumed substantive session of 1997).

10. By its resolution 1997/65 of 25 July 1997, the Council established, under the aegis of the Commission, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, which will report to the Commission at its eighth session, in the year 2000. The Council also decided that the Forum would hold its first organizational session in New York from 1 to 3 October 1997. At the organizational session, the Forum would decide on the programme and modalities of its work and recommend to the Council the number, venue and the duration of its substantive sessions to be held during the period 1998-2000.

11. In carrying out its functions related to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996, the Council has reviewed the work of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development and of the Committee on Natural Resources, inter alia with a view of making the work of these bodies "more compatible with and supportive of the programme of work of the Commission", the need for which was underscored by the Assembly in paragraph 135 of the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21. The Chairman's summary of the Council's deliberations on this matter is contained in the annex to Council decision 1997/310 of 25 July 1997. Further consideration of this issue will continue at the Council's resumed substantive session of 1997. The General Assembly is reminded that the Secretary-General's proposals on possible reform of these two bodies are contained in paragraph 135 of his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950).

Follow-up action by the United Nations system

12. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly underscored that the achievement of sustainable development required continued support from international institutions. The Assembly felt that the institutional framework outlined in chapter 38 of Agenda 21 and determined by the Assembly in its resolution 47/191 and other relevant resolutions, including the specific functions and roles of various organs, organizations and programmes within and outside the United Nations system, would continue to be fully relevant in the period after the special session. The Assembly also stressed that, in the light of the ongoing discussions on reform within the United Nations, international institutional arrangements in the area of sustainable development were intended to contribute to the goal of strengthening the entire United Nations system. In that context, the Assembly stressed the particular importance of strengthening institutions for sustainable development.

13. Furthermore, the General Assembly underlined that it was necessary to strengthen the Administrative Committee on Coordination Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its system of task managers, with a view to further enhancing system-wide intersectoral cooperation and coordination for the implementation of Agenda 21 and for the promotion of coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the area of sustainable development. As

outlined in his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950), the Secretary-General fully supports this concern of the Assembly.

14. The General Assembly also stressed that in order to facilitate the national implementation of Agenda 21, all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, within their respective areas of expertise and mandates, should strengthen, individually and jointly, the support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21 and make their efforts and actions consistent with national plans, policies and priorities of member States. The Assembly also underscored that coordination of United Nations activities at the field level should be further enhanced through the resident coordinator system in full consultation with national Governments.

15. Shortly after the closure of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, on 9 July 1997, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development met informally in Geneva, during the Council's substantive session of 1997. This meeting was intended to serve as a "brainstorming" session to assess the results of the special session and to prepare for an in-depth discussion of ways and means for ensuring an effective and collaborative response to its outcomes by the United Nations system during the tenth meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee (to be held at Geneva on 17 and 18 September 1997).

16. The participants in the informal meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee agreed that the main challenge for the Committee and its task managers in the period after the special session would be to ensure a stronger focus in inter-agency collaboration on practical implementation, particularly at the country level. It was felt that that, inter alia, would improve linkages between the results of policy discussions and agreements reached at the international level with national sustainable development activities. In particular, it was agreed that it would be essential to make the best use of the experience and knowledge available in the United Nations system, including that of the task managers, with delivery capacities of the United Nations Development Programme at the national level. It was also agreed that it would be particularly important to develop further common approaches that would guide future system-wide work in all key areas of sustainable development.

17. Member States will be informed of the specific decisions taken and actions initiated by the Inter-Agency Committee in the context of a report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

Measures within the United Nations Secretariat

18. The ongoing consolidation of the three Secretariat departments in the economic and social fields into one consolidated Department for Economic and Social Affairs will, inter alia, lead to integration of the Secretariat's functions related to the provision of substantive support to intergovernmental processes and their normative setting activities, relevant analytical work and the provision of policy advisory services to Governments, at their request.

19. Accordingly, it is expected that the new functions of the Division for Sustainable Development will enhance the capacity of the Secretariat to support

action at all levels to implement Agenda 21, and to ensure greater coherence in the Secretariat's work in the area of sustainable development in general. This will include stronger support to regional, national and local activities, as well as further enhancing the dialogue and inter-action with the major groups and other actors involved in the implementation of Agenda 21.

20. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to review the functioning of the High-Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development and present proposals on ways to promote more direct interaction between the Board and the Commission, with a view to ensuring that the Board contributed to the deliberations on specific themes considered by the Commission in accordance with its programme of work.

21. As it was outlined in his report dated 14 July 1997 (A/51/950), the Secretary-General feels, however, that with the initiation by the Commission on Sustainable Development of promising new arrangements for consultation with and participation in its work by various actors from the civil society, the functions of the Board could now be effectively performed through those processes, and the Board could be discontinued.

Future reviews

22. In the programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly decided that the next comprehensive review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 by the General Assembly would take place in the year 2002. The Secretary-General will present his suggestions on the modalities of this review to the General Assembly at its 55th session, in the year 2000.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I and Vol. I/Corr.1, Vol. II, Vol. III and Vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and Corrigenda), Vol. I: Resolutions Adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex I.

[2] Ibid., annex II.

[3] Ibid., annex III.